

**Educating Idaho's
Children and Youth
who are
Deaf/Hard of Hearing
in the
21st Century:
Where, How, and Why**

A research prospectus
Submitted to the Idaho State Board of Education

Idaho State University

Department of Communication Sciences & Disorders, and Education of the Deaf

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Introduction

Over the last two decades or more governors and state legislatures, as well as, departments of education, have been concerned with the general notion of education reform and how to implement various reform efforts. More recently, these same governmental entities have had to deal with implementation of additional federal education legislation, notably the No Child Left Behind Act and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act / Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act. Given these concerns one would think that elected state office holders would not have time to consider state education policy issues. Fortunately, this is not the case. Rather than disappearing, local education concerns and issues have a way of reminding elected officials that “all politics is local.”

Among the various local education concerns and issues is one that is of interest to a rather small population of parents, educators, and policy makers. This issue, in certain states, concerns the viability of state supported schools for the deaf and the blind to be a stand alone provider of educational services. In other states, the issue is presented more basically; How can effective educational services be identified, organized and delivered to deaf and hard of hearing children and youth in an efficient manner? Responses to these issues have been diverse, coming from state task forces or commissions representing states, such as, California, Colorado, Kentucky, Maine and Nebraska. For example, state task forces in California and Colorado produced reports that offered ‘guidance’ to existing schools and programs for the deaf in their respective states. On the other hand, Nebraska closed its school for the deaf and established ‘regional programs.’ Maine passed legislation that changed the identity of its state supported school for the deaf: that is, it is now called the Maine Educational Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the Governor Baxter School for the Deaf. Using a different approach, Kentucky contracted with the American Institutes for Research to study the programs and facilities of the Kentucky School for the Deaf and of the Kentucky School for the Blind to determine if these state educational institutions were preparing deaf/hard of hearing and blind students to meet new education performance standards. Such diversity underscores the concern state legislators have with not only broad educational reform issues, but with ones that affect a much smaller population of students and their families.

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Recently, another state started the process of inquiring if its state supported school for the deaf and the blind is serving all deaf and blind students according to their needs. Just as other states approached the issue within a certain framework, Idaho's inquiry is framed within two concurrent investigations. One investigation is being undertaken by the Idaho Legislature, Office of Program Evaluations: the other is being sponsored by the Idaho State Board of Education. If states are 'laboratories of democracy' then a study of Idaho's inquiries into the status of educating deaf/hard of hearing children in Idaho might further our understanding of state level policy making as it pertains to concerns and issues raised by elected office holders and by individuals directly affected by state deaf education policies.

Proposed Study

Given the recent activities that have been undertaken by various states to address the issue of providing comprehensive educational services to the population of deaf/hard of hearing individuals, ages 0-21, as well as the activities that have taken place at the national level over the last forty years, the question arises as to what others might learn from these experiences as they consider the issue of educating the current population of infants, toddlers, children, and youth who are deaf/hard of hearing for the 21st century. To address this issue, the Idaho State University research team proposes the following study.

The study will do the following: [Prospectus]

Task I: Understand Idaho's situation:

[1] Document activities undertaken by the Idaho Legislature, Office of Program Evaluation regarding the status of the Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind, as requested by the Joint Legislative Committee Oversight Committee [2005].

[2] Document activities undertaken by the Idaho State Board of Education, Committee to Review ISDB regarding the status of the Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind [2005].

Prospectus [4]

Task II: Understand what other states are doing:

[3] Examine documents/reports produced by task forces/commissions in other states that pertain to the education of deaf/hard of hearing students. Particular attention will be given to how inquiries were framed, research methodologies, and findings.

Task III: Attempt to answer the question: What do 21st century education service delivery systems for deaf/hard of hearing children and youth look like?

[4] Using a future scenarios approach, the research team will develop a number of education service delivery systems for Idaho's school-age population of children/youth who are deaf/hard of hearing.

Task IV: Emerging themes:

[5] Explore themes that have not been associated with existing inquiries into the perceptions of delivery of educational services to children who are deaf/hard of hearing. These themes relate to: [1] intractability problems in deaf education, [2] public engagement/constructive engagement, [3] stakeholder theory, [4] intermediaries and networks, and [5] the changing nature of education, including deaf education.

In undertaking these tasks, the research team will:

- [a] document resources used, including web site information;
- [b] identify contacts who provide information;
- [c] keep 'critical agencies/persons' informed during the inquiry; and
- [d] prepare a final report.

Prospectus [5]

Task I: Understand Idaho's Situation

Chronology

As with most public policy events, some aspects are murky and others less murky. The less murky activities can be identified as a result of a heightened sense of transparency in most, if not all, public agencies. In the case of this study, both the Office of Performance Evaluation and the Idaho State Board of Education have posted basic information about their inquiries into the Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind on their respective web sites. The web site for the Office of Performance Evaluation is [<http://www.legislature.idaho.gov/ope/>] and the web site for the Board is [<http://www.idahoboardofed.org/>]. This information has been assembled into a chronology that covers [as of this time] the period, March 4, 2005 to July 19, 2005.

March 4, 2005

On March 4, 2005, the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee of the Idaho Legislature met to consider topics for review by the Office of Performance Evaluations. One of the topics on the agenda was a proposed study of the cost of education at the Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind (ISDB). It was decided that the ISDB study be given the first priority and that the other topics be given lower rankings. This was passed unanimously.

March 19, 2005

At the March 9-10, 2005 meeting of the Idaho State Board of Education, an agenda item pertaining to the Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind was listed. The exact listing of the item was as follows:

Planning, Policy and Governmental Affairs

10. Educational Needs at the Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind

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Addressing the agenda item was Senator Hal Bunderson, (R) from Meridian, Idaho. According to the minutes, State Senator Bunderson covered a total of ten issues. These issues were as follows:

- [1] Level of services the state provides to all deaf children.
- [2] The culture and philosophy of the Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind.
- [3] Funding provided to the Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind.
- [4] Use of technology to provide other means of treatment.
- [5] State responsibilities with respect to (a) access, (b) funding, and (c) treatment options.
- [6] (Encouraged the Board to examine) the educational infrastructure of ISDB and consider what changes need to be made to improve services as well as to move the system forward so that constraints are removed.
- [7] (Encouraged the Board to) evaluate the cost structure.
- [8] (Encouraged the Board to) consider the role/roles of technology [current and future] and its possible use in providing educational services ‘beyond the walls of the ISDB campus.’
- [9] (Advised the Board on the) advantages of educating deaf children in their home school districts rather than being ‘institutionalized.’
- [10] (He prompted) the Board to establish a committee ‘to ask what can be done to make things better for deaf students in Idaho.’”

In addition to the presentation by State Senator Bunderson, two parents of deaf children spoke to the Board during the Open Forum session. These parents were, Lesa Coleman, a board member of Idaho Sound Beginnings and Mark Miller, a physician. Both addressed the challenges encountered in getting an appropriate education for their children.

The Board minutes for the March 9-10 meeting also record a brief interaction between Board members and the Superintendent of the Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind. During what is called the Agency Dashboard Reports, each agency head is given time to make a short representation about their respective agency. Following the report by

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Mr. Havey Lyter, Superintendent of ISDB, Board member Terrel questioned Mr. Lyter about concerns expressed by State Senator Bunderson. Mr. Lyter noted that ISDB had worked with Meridian School District in an effort to provide certain educational services (e.g., an oral education program). He also noted, that the primary responsibility for special education services is with the local school district. He also noted that other comments made by State Senator Bunderson were ‘commendable’ but perhaps too costly and not feasible at this time. According to the minutes of this meeting, Board member Hall noted that, at the request of State Senator Bunderson, a committee should be appointed to look at these issues and that any additional discussion should wait until the report is completed. Board President Lewis noted that a committee would be established with Board members Terrell and McGee as Board representatives.

May 2, 2005

In May, 2005, the Office of Performance Evaluations posted the scope of its study of ISDB. According to the announcement, the planned evaluation would focus on the following questions:

- [1] What are the current roles and responsibilities of ISDB? Are they consistent with state and federal laws, State Board of Education policies and procedures, and interagency agreements? How does ISDB’s role compare to similar schools in other states?
- [2] What are the enrollment characteristics and trends at ISDB’s residential and outreach programs? What are the national enrollment trends?
- [3] What residential and outreach services is ISDB providing and what are the annual costs of those services? What ISDB programming exists to prepare students for life following graduation?
- [4] What services are other states providing for deaf and/or blind students? Do other states offer best practices or models that could benefit Idaho?

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[5] How is ISDB addressing technologies such as cochlear implants and digital hearing aids? What are the costs and educational benefits of these technologies?

[6] What input can parents and school district officials offer regarding ISDB residential and outreach services?

July 19, 2005

On July 19, 2005, the Idaho State Board of Education announced that a committee had been created to review the mission and organization of ISDB. As noted in the announcement, the Committee's goals included the following:

[1] Review how ISDB delivers services to students throughout the state and review the role and responsibility of local school districts in the education of deaf or blind students.

[2] Make recommendations for improving the organization structure for the ISDB residential program, the central campus day program and the regional outreach programs.

[3] Identify the issues associated with a state agency providing both educational services to school district students both at the ISDB campus and at the local school district.

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Idaho State University Research Team

The research team for this project will come from the Department of Communication Sciences & Disorders, and Education of the Deaf. The members include:

- [a] Dr. Thomas M Longhurst (Professor, Speech-Language Pathology)
- [b] Dr. David Mercaldo (Associate Professor, Deaf Education)
- [c] Emily Turner (Clinical Assistant Professor, Educational Interpreting)
- [d] Dr. Mary Whitaker (Clinical Assistant Professor, Audiology)

This team reflects a set of values, beliefs and attributes which makes this project feasible. To begin with it is multi-disciplined: it includes those disciplines that have a primary interest in the education of all deaf/hard of hearing learners. Secondly, the members of the team value the importance of conducting research and using research findings to make reasoned decisions to improve the delivery of services to this population. Thirdly, all team members are involved in the preparation of professionals, as well as the continued professional development of persons who are in the fields of audiology, speech-language pathology, deaf education, and sign language interpreting. Fourthly, team members have been actively involved in the development of federally funded multi-state as well as multi-site programs in the areas of deaf education and sign language interpreting. It should be noted that this particular attribute involved extensive collaboration on the part of one team member, Dr. Longhurst, in working with state departments of education in the Intermountain West (MT, WA, OR, ID, NV, UT, WY, AZ), as well as with schools for the deaf in Arizona, Idaho, Montana, and Utah. Finally, team members have been instrumental in developing and implementing professional coursework/degree programs that are delivered through televised and internet based distance learning technologies.

The contact person for the project is Dr. Thomas M Longhurst, Director of the Deaf Education Division at ISU. His phone number is 208-282-2204, email is longtho@isu.edu and address is CSED Dept., ISU, Campus Box 8116, Pocatello, ID 83209-8116.